

Lutheran World Information

1507

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LWF President Bishop Younan to 2015 Council: we need to taste the hope that strips me of my selfishness.
Photo: LWF/Helen Putzman

Young Reformers meet in Wittenberg

“Freed by God’s Love to Change the World”

GENEVA (LWI) – The Global Young Reformer’s Network of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) will meet in Wittenberg, Germany for a workshop on the Lutheran Reformation. From 22 August to 04 September, this global encounter will bring together 145 young reformers from all LWF member churches and several theology students sent by Lutheran faculties.

The workshop is a preparation of the 2017 Reformation anniversary, which the LWF will commemorate in Namibia. Under the Global Young Reformers Network theme “Freed by God’s Love to Change the World,” young delegates will share, learn and decide together

for local and regional follow ups. They will also visit parishes in the hosting Evangelical Lutheran Church of Central Germany and social-diaconal projects. The program was prepared by the Global Young Reformers Steering Committee, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Central Germany and the LWF Youth Desk.

“This will be a time of intensive mutual sharing and will also offer an opportunity to get to know young Christians from Central Germany,” Bishop Ilse Junkermann of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Central Germany writes in a greeting to the delegates. “You will

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see how we live out our faith here, in a region that has become profoundly secularized”.

Junkermann also expressed her hope that the young reformers will carry the Reformation theme into the 21st century. “Ecclesia semper reformanda’ – this is also the motto that you – young people from all continents – have committed to,”

Bishop Junkermann writes. “You are developing ideas and projects for your Lutheran home churches and keeping in contact with each other through your international network. This way you are helping to shape the future of Lutheran Christianity worldwide and to form a worldwide web for justice, peace and the healing of creation”.

The Global Young Reformers Network is a program of the LWF created by youth and for youth. On the journey

to the 2017 Reformation anniversary, it wants to empower young people to engage in all aspects of church and communion life. The global network consists of young Lutherans from all 145 LWF member churches and the seven LWF regions.

For more information, resources, news, program and images see www.lutheranworld.org/content/workshop-wittenberg

Seeking common ground on baptism

Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission meets in Budapest

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians have met in Budapest, Hungary, 13-21 July as part of their ongoing commitment to understand the common ground they share and differences they hold on baptism.

The two Christian traditions have been in dialogue for 50 years on a variety of theological issues and the most recent meeting of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity focused on “Baptism and growing communion”.

In this study of baptism, the commission is building on earlier ecumenical dialogues on baptism and focusing on the question of what kind of ecclesial communion arises from Lutheran and Roman Catholic shared understanding of baptism.

The Budapest meeting was organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the local hosting church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH). Meetings took place at the Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Grow in communion

The conversation began in 2009 but was halted by preparations for the study document, *From Conflict to Communion*, which is the first attempt

by Lutherans and Roman Catholics to describe jointly the history of the Reformation, the 500th anniversary of which will be marked in 2017.

“Some may ask why we need dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics on baptism while there are other theological issues that present greater challenges between the two traditions,” Rev. Kaisamari Hintikka, Director of the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness, said. She added that in looking at the kind of communion arises on the basis of our shared understanding of baptism, the commission is responding to one of the ecumenical imperatives presented in *From Conflict to Communion* – that

Lutherans and Catholics should always begin from the perspective of unity. “Hence, I believe that this starting point gives us good opportunity to grow in the communion that already exists between us,” Rev. Hintikka added.

Inter-confessional meetings

The dialogue was co-chaired by Bishop emeritus Eero Huovinen of Helsinki, Finland, on the Lutheran side, and Bishop William Kenney of Birmingham, United Kingdom, on the Roman Catholic side. The work of the meeting was based on brief thematic papers prepared by the commission members.



Participants of the consultations in front of the theological institute. Photo: Zsuzsanna Bolla-Horvath/ ELCH

During the meeting a reception was hosted by the ELCH at the Lutheran High School of Deák tér, where commission members met representatives of the Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Reformed churches, and the Hungarian government.

On 19 July, the commission members visited Szentendre city, where they attended a Lutheran worship service and baptism presided by Rev. Olivier Horváat-Hegyí. Later that day Prof. Dr fr Mihály Kranitz from the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary accompanied the commission members on a guided visit to the Basilica of Esztergom, the ancient capital of Hungary.

Towards tangible unity

In an interview, Swiss theologian Eva-Maria Faber, a member of the commission on the Roman Catholic side, commented on the state of the dialogue, which has seen a number of important landmarks over the five decades.

“Steps toward more tangible unity, for example towards more visible Eucharistic fellowship, may be deficient as long as we have not clarified all theological questions and resolved the differences,” she said.

“But staying in division is also deficient and could have serious consequences,” added Faber, the Roman

Catholic Professor for Dogmatics and Fundamental Theology at the Theological University of Chur in Switzerland.

Protestant theologian Prof Dr Theodor Dieter, director of the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical Research, called the dialogue a “form of seeing our own church with the eyes of the other church. We must not lose sight of each other – that is an on-going challenge,” he said.

The next meeting of the commission will take place 14-21 July 2016 in London, United Kingdom, and will be hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

“Developing greater fellowship”

Prof. Eva Maria Faber on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI) – During the meeting of the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission in Budapest, Hungary, Lutheran World Information spoke to Eva-Maria Faber, Catholic Professor for Dogmatics and Fundamental Theology at the Theological University of Chur (Switzerland) on the state of the dialogue and the joint commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.

LWI: In your view, what are the most important steps in the 50 years of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue?

Prof. Faber: The most important step is probably the first one, without which nothing would have followed: the readiness to encounter one another and to discover our common faith. There was confidence that the churches would very soon find their way to greater fellowship—these hopes have been partly fulfilled, but not in every respect. A further remarkable step, in 1983, was the document, *Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, marking the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. More recently I regard the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification as one of the most important steps because this is the first time that an



Prof. Eva Maria Faber at the consultation talks in Budapest. Photo: Zsuzsanna Horváth-Bolla

ecumenical dialogue document has been officially received.

That means the respective Church leadership declared that the document was an authentic expression of our common faith so that it now belongs to the doctrinal documents of both churches. That meant a fresh start in our common doctrinal tradition.

How did the publication of *From Conflict to Communion* contribute to this dialogue?

With respect to the Reformation anniversary of 2017, the Catholic side sometimes asked whether it had anything to celebrate. Could we participate in this anniversary at all? From *Conflict to Communion* documents a common view of the very events that led to a painful break-up of the church. That enabled a more just perception of the past – on the one hand, in mutual appreciation and, on the other, in mutual realization of wrongs in the Catholic Church and also of the dark sides of

the Reformation upheavals. Above all, however, looking back at the 500th anniversary of the Reformation has simultaneously made us more aware of the ecumenical path that has meanwhile begun. When recalling the Reformation and the Catholic resistance to it, we must today look at the growing ecumenical fellowship.

From Conflict to Communion has now been translated into seven languages. Why do you think it is so popular in the respective churches?

While other ecumenical documents follow a theological agenda, this is a document that relates to an upcoming occasion. That naturally attracts attention, above all when it is an occasion that has such weight as the Reformation anniversary. The practical imperatives at the end of the document were certainly conducive to the positive reception of the document.

How does the global Catholic-Lutheran dialogue take up the challenges churches face at the congregational level?

This is often an underlying question, as is the issue of how to deal with the unmistakable differences between ecumenical practice in the local communities and the official ecumenical rules. However, a theological dialogue commission has its own momentum, in that it pursues theological questions. The church leadership bodies have commissioned it to do so. We should, of course, keep in mind that this activity is sometimes far away from the daily events in the church. We nevertheless hope that dialogues can also impact practically on congregational life.

In what direction will the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue develop in future?

We must become more aware of how much the continuing church

division represents a fundamental and dismaying defect for each of our churches. Realizing this should change our lists of priorities. Steps towards more tangible unity, eg towards more visible Eucharistic fellowship, may be deficient as long as we have not clarified all theological questions and resolved the differences. But staying in division is also deficient and could have serious consequences.

What does the joint Reformation commemoration in 2017 mean to you?

I hope that the reconciled fellowship between different churches can grow, thanks to the anniversary. I cherish the same hope for 2019 when we in Zürich celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Switzerland.

“Seeing with the eyes of the others”

Prof. Theodor Dieter on the Lutheran- Roman Catholic Dialogue

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI) – During the meeting of the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission in Budapest, Hungary, Lutheran World Information spoke to Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter, director of the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical

Research about dialogue and ecumenism at the congregational level.

LWI: What do you think are the most important steps in the 50 years of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue?

Theodor Dieter: First I would name the first dialogue document, the Malta Report (1972), that gave a hopeful overview of ecumenical problems between Catholics and Lutherans. The individual questions raised were taken up in the following dialogues. The second important step is the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification that was officially signed by the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999. This was an official, creative “harvesting” of the dialogue results in the justification question. The third step is the joint publication *From Conflict to Communion* (2013).

How did the publication of From Conflict to Communion contribute to this dialogue?

This document brings out the fruitful nature of the results of previous dialogues such as the Protestant and Catholic research into the Reformation.



Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter at the consultations in Budapest. Photo: Zsuzsanna Horváth-Bolla

From Conflict to Communion has now been translated into seven languages. Why do you think it is so popular in the respective churches?

Catholic and Protestant churches and congregations face the project of jointly remembering the beginning of the Reformation 500 years ago without causing confessional divisions to break out again. The anniversary of the Reformation is an ecumenical challenge *par excellence*. Here ecumenism is at stake. From Conflict to Communion is successful because it tackles this question ecumenically and not from a confessional perspective: it describes the altered conditions of remembering the Reformation today; it gives the necessary information on history and theology in compact form; it places Luther's theological insights in the context of Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, thus "harvesting" its fruits; it says what churches and congregations

can do in 2017 by naming the grounds for a common celebration and also for common lament and confession of guilt; it closes with five imperatives that are intended to renew ecumenical commitment.

How does the global Catholic-Lutheran dialogue take up the challenges churches face at the congregational level?

These questions are taken up directly and indirectly. The issue of altar fellowship is urgent and is dealt with directly. Certain traditional controversies are less urgent as they are no longer regarded as problems at the congregational level. The question is: What does that mean theologically?

In what direction will the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue develop in future?

As the churches become more globalized, they will probably take up

regional ecumenical challenges more specifically at the international level. Now that very many traditional ecumenical topics have been discussed in the dialogues, we will see more emphasis laid on putting across the results and on issues connected with current challenges. However, the dialogues will still be the institutionalized form of seeing our own church with the eyes of the other church. We must not lose sight of each other – that is an ongoing challenge.

What does the joint commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 mean to you?

I believe it is going to be an ecumenical festival that celebrates the great ecumenical significance of Reformation theology and its great ecumenical potential to the glory of God and for the good of the churches and their unity.

LWF General Secretary Junge Speaks at Mennonite World Conference

“Transforming power of reconciliation”

HARRISBURG, United States/GENEVA (LWI)

– Five years after Lutherans asked Mennonites to forgive violence against their ancestors, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge told the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) their forgiveness brought Lutherans and Mennonites closer together to serve the world.

Through the Mennonite action at the LWF Assembly in 2010, the LWF apologized for Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century, the ignorance towards these actions till the present day and for inappropriate and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists by Lutheran authors. The Assembly prayed for healing of memories and reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites. That action and the subsequent forgiveness by the MWC also

brought new energy into the relations between Lutherans and Mennonites, Junge said.

“Your forgiveness has helped us to continue engaging in much deeper conversation about issues we still see differently, differences, however, that do not prevent us from seeking closer witness to the Triune God,” he said.

A church to serve the neighbour

In a greeting to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly on 23 July (local time) the LWF General Secretary also recalled the financial contribution that Mennonites offered to support LWF's services in the Dadaab refugee camp in Keyna, which at the time was home to half a million refugees from Somalia.

This contribution was made only a year after the Mennonite Action at the Assembly in Stuttgart.

“We understood as never before that reconciliation among Christian Communion will always want to transcend the realm of the church and become a telling story to people suffering, deprived from life in abundance,” Junge said, thanking the Mennonite Central Committee for “both that contribution for the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, and for that lesson, which continues to inspire us, also in view of our relations with other Christian World Communion”.

Catholicity and diversity

Speaking at the General Council of MWC, meeting at Harrisburg, Penn-



Rev. Dr. Martin Junge addresses the Mennonite World Conference, saying the forgiveness of Mennonites brought Lutherans and Mennonites closer together to serve the world. Photo: Jon Carlson for Mennonite World Conference

sylvania, on 20 July, Junge reflected on LWF's experience of being a communion of churches that emphasizes both catholicity and diversity.

He emphasized that communions of churches ought to follow God's call for unity, and connect Christ's universal message of salvation to local contexts.

Junge pointed to the experience of the apostles who gathered lovingly and in prayer to discern about the diversity they were experiencing in those early years of being the church. "To be the church in apostolic tradition is to stick both to the faith of the apostles, *and* to the ways the apostles related to each other on the basis of this faith, even in

difficult times," Junge added. "To be the church in apostolic tradition is to care about both: the truth of faith, and the unity of the church".

Relationship as a gift and a task

He said that for its part LWF comes together as a communion of 145 churches worldwide not as a matter of strategy but because God calls them together. Their relationship is a gift of God.

"As such, communion relationships demand a special attention, a special accountability and a special responsi-

bility. All this calls for mutuality both in relationships and in the way this ownership is expressed," said Junge. "Communion relationships call for creativity, theological coherence, patience and love as member churches discover how to express God's call for them, and how they should act towards each other".

Member churches continue to be called to witness in their local contexts, serving people who need justice, healing and reconciliation. "They offer the universal message of God's love for the world and of God's works of salvation in Jesus Christ to their specific reality," Junge emphasized.

Speaking from the LWF process, Junge shared the experience that catholicity and contextuality or diversity must be held together even though they can sometimes be in tension. "That is then the gift and the task of being churches in communion relationships. It is about understanding the need of, and giving the space to each member church to be the church in its context, thereby avoiding an alienating hegemony on each other; and it is to understand the need of each member church to connect to its catholicity, thereby avoiding its cultural captivity or absolutism," Junge added.

LWF president Bishop Younan visits member church in Kazakhstan

Accompanying each other in the Lutheran communion

JERUSALEM (LWI) – The President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan recently paid a pastoral visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan (ELCRK). He talked to Lutheran World Information (LWI) about some of the impressions from his recent visit, during which he met

a group of 20 pastors and Bishop Yuri Novgorodov in Astana.

"This was my first visit to Kazakhstan as LWF president. I learned a lot about the joys and challenges of the Kazakhstan Lutheran church. I explained our work together with the member churches: caring for refugees, advocacy for climate justice,

women's empowerment, theological reflections, ecumenical relations and inter-religious dialogue and so on," Younan said.

"Being in the communion means we are in pulpit and altar fellowship," Younan said. "This means when I visit your Church I am at home with my sisters and brothers in Christ as we

celebrate the Holy Communion that sends us together to the world with a call to holistic mission.”

The conversations helped clarify the LWF’s role in the relationship with its member churches. “It was important to emphasize that the LWF as a communion of churches respects the autonomy of each church and that we accompany the churches upon invitation.”

However, being churches in communion “also means that we are accountable to each other,” Younan remarked.

Geographical isolation

The ELCRK’s core membership is made up of 2500 people in 50 congregations scattered across the country. The distance between congregations can be up to 3000kms. The president saw his visit as an opportunity to learn firsthand the challenges of being geographically isolated.

“I certainly felt how being far and in such a big country, and in another language context, can be a hindrance. I came to understand the difficulty of even gathering pastors to a national church meeting,” said Younan, who is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Education and formation of pastors are key priorities of the ELCRK, which belongs to the Federation of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Russia and Other States. “There is a hunger for Lutheran literature to be translated into Russian,” he noted.

The LWF president also heard the church’s excitement over plans to

build a new church in Astana that will include a community center, youth services and guest house, and about its good relations with the government.

Spirituality

But it was the church’s spirituality and deep piety that most struck the LWF president. “You have a certain spirituality in Kazakhstan; and I invite you to come to the table with your spirituality. It is an added value,” he said, referring to conversations with the pastors, and his church attendance.

“I suggested that they should be more involved in the life of the communion, including the Global Young Reformers’ Network, the women’s networks and other aspects of LWF,” he said. “This for me was a pastoral visit, and I let them know how important they are as part of the Lutheran communion.”



LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan with Bishop Yuri Novgorodov (very last row) and other pastors and church officials of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan, during the June visit to Astana. Photo: ELCRK

Countering extremism

Younan was in Astana also to participate in the international Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. At the gathering, he challenged the religious and political leaders to enhance their own engagement in fighting extremism and in peace building efforts.

“Extremists exist in all religions. None has a monopoly on extremism. How do our speeches in the churches, mosques, temples reflect living together and co-existence? That is a challenge for us right now,” he noted.

Younan emphasized his call to faith groups to examine the curricula they teach and offer their countries by asking: “Do we promote extremism or acceptance of the other that is different? Do we promote the concept of seeing the image of God in the other?”

Increased awareness of faith groups’ contribution to UN development goals

Junge reflects on LWF’s participation in New York roundtable

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomes the increased awareness in the United Nations (UN) about faith-based organizations’ contribution to global development.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Martin Junge said this was particularly evident during the 10-11 July roundtable discussion hosted by UN agencies in New York to discuss collaboration

and potential partnerships in the areas of governance, peace and security and gender equality. He was among 50 leaders of faith-based organizations participating in the meeting that also



Elisabeth Purba (center) explaining about HIV & AIDS at a youth workshop organized by the Indonesia LWF National Committee in Desa Bulu Cina, Sumatra. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

focused on future objectives for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be agreed at the next UN Summit this September.

“There is recognition for the role of faith-based organizations, not only in view of their implementing capacity, but also in view of their specific vocation to promote justice, peace and reconciliation,” Junge noted.

“This vocation is a powerful resource that churches can offer within their own contexts. It triggers and boosts commitment to work for life in fullness for all,” he emphasized.

The general secretary said more work needs to be done to “promote literacy at both ends” so that faith-based organizations and the UN can better relate to one another, particularly as

they both work to promote dignity and fullness of life for all.

“I see many potentials for the LWF and its member churches to contribute towards the attainment of the sustainable development goals,” he added.

At its Council meeting in June, the LWF affirmed its support for the SDGs which include good governance (transparency, accountability, anti-corruption), justice for the poor, equality (equal access to essential services) and peacebuilding.

The governing body urged LWF member churches to stay informed about the SDGs and advocate for their full funding and implementation.

At the New York roundtable, faith groups joined officials from the UN Development Programme, UN Children’s Fund and UNAIDS among others, to

negotiate the post-2015 universal development goals. In a similar gathering in 2014, the UN highlighted the need to promote partnerships with faith-based organizations.

The UN adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000, targeting eight objectives—Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—to halve global poverty by 2015. They are considered as one of the most successful anti-poverty initiatives in history, with most of the targets met by 2010. This includes access to primary education by children in developing regions; prevention of malaria deaths and availability of life-saving HIV medication.

The post-2015 sustainable development goals are a set of 17 targets to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. They include halting hunger, gaining food security and improved nutrition; ensuring healthy lives and wellbeing for all ages, as well as equitable quality education for all; and achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.

They also focus on ensuring availability and sustainability of water and sanitation; access to reliable and modern energy; urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; and sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth with full and productive employment.

“It is for centuries that churches and their institutions have been involved in development work within their own contexts,” Junge emphasized.

Strengthening capacity for women’s rights advocacy in faith-based organizations

LWF and partners workshop facilitates access to UN mechanisms

GENEVA (LWI) – Training workshops organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have strengthened Rev. Solange Yumba wa Nkulu’s role as national coordinator for women, youth and family work for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo. “But this one has made all the difference in the way I perceive my

work for women’s rights,” she says of her participation in the faith-based organizations training on Women’s Human Rights Advocacy in Geneva this week.

The Congolese pastor is among 25 women and men from 18 countries participating in the 7-11 July workshop organized by the LWF jointly with the

World Council of Churches (WCC), World Young Women’s Christian Association, ACT Alliance and Finn Church Aid. The training is aimed at increasing participants’ effectiveness in the use of United Nations mechanisms such as reporting to the Committee for the Convention on the Elimination



Dr Helen Kijo-Bisimba, of Tanzania (left), and Rev. Solange Yumba wa Nkulu, DRC, at the women's rights advocacy training in Geneva. Photo: LWF/P. Mumia

of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of individual countries' human rights situations.

"This training has given me a comprehensive understanding of how my DRC context can specifically contribute to sharpening LWF's global advocacy. Women have suffered all sorts of violations, including rape and other forms of gender-based violence because of the protracted civil conflict. Learning how the UN Human Rights mechanism works, knowing the tools that I can use locally to mobilize, engage and influence important global decisions for women's empowerment was particularly important," Yumba wa Nkulu emphasized.

Training facilitators from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the LWF Office for International Affairs and Human Rights presented the working mechanisms of CEDAW and the periodic review respectively. Other LWF and partner organizations' staff elaborated the role of religion in human rights advocacy; how to integrate gender analysis and rights-based approach in advocacy for women's human rights; and opportunities and challenges for collaboration between faith-based organizations and other UN agencies.

Participants also held discussions with CEDAW Committee experts and joined the committee's review session for Spain.

The LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) program at the Department for Theology and Public Witness coordinated the training. One of the workshop's reference documents was the LWF Gender Justice Policy, approved by the LWF in 2013, and currently being adapted by member churches for their respective contexts.

Local collaboration with civil society

The workshop included sessions on local advocacy by civil society and faith-based organizations. Ms Beatriz Garcíá del Campo from the LWF World Service program in Colombia, discussed the value of forging partnerships with churches, other FBOs and civil society organizations in defending human rights' workers and women in complex conflict situations.

In her presentation, Dr Helen Kijo-Bisimba, executive director of Tanzania's Legal and Human Rights Centre, explained her organization's involvement in reviewing the country's human rights situation since 2012. The

center has increased its engagement with civil society organizations in order to influence government compliance in implementing the periodic review recommendations. "We are making progress, but churches and other faith bodies need to come on board in a country with over 3,000 NGOs," added Kijo-Bisimba, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

Keeping up the momentum

The workshop concludes today, with participants setting priorities for their respective regions and strategizing how to keep the momentum of linking grassroots' initiatives to global advocacy. "Until now, I did not fully understand how I can influence change to promote women's welfare at the national level," remarked Rev. Kenneth Sibanda, gender justice program coordinator for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe Central Diocese.

"Learning about CEDAW, the Universal Periodic Review, LWF's advocacy work and other approaches encourages and empowers my engagement in the church and with the government on violence against women including domestic violence," Sibanda noted.

For LWF training co-organizer Maria Cristina Rendón, the workshop has provided a unique and meaningful platform to share experiences and move forward together with a common perspective. "As members of civil society, faith-based organizations are part of the critical grassroots that holds governments accountable at national level for the implementation of CEDAW and UPR recommendations as well as the UN Security Council resolution on women, peace and security," added Rendón, WICAS program assistant.

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Canadian Lutherans look outward as national convention ends

National Bishop Johnson re-elected, actions on “welcoming the stranger” and climate justice

WINNIPEG, Canada/GENEVA (LWI)— The 15th National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) concluded on 12 July in Edmonton, Alberta, leaving a wave of excitement as participants departed home to further the work of liberation by God’s grace.

Nearly 400 convention delegates and invited guests joined parishioners in joyful singing of hymns for the closing worship service at Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmonton. Reflecting the full communion partnership between the ELCIC and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the ACC delivered the sermon, putting in a biblical context the outcome of the 9-12 July convention.

He congratulated ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson on her re-election to a third four-year term. Johnson, who has served as national bishop of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member church since 2007, is also LWF Vice-President for the North American region.

Liberated by God’s grace

Invoking the theme of the convention and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, “Liberated by God’s Grace,” the ACC Primate offered images and impressions of what this meant for the Canadian Lutheran church.

“By God’s grace, yours is a church being continually liberated from a clinging to the past, and liberated for that future to which God is calling you at every level of your church, in the spirit of continuing reformation,” Hiltz said.

“Yours is a church liberated from continually looking in upon itself. You have been turned inside out, liberated for looking out upon the world as a church “In Mission for Others,” he said, referring to the ELCIC’s vision statement.

Indigenous issues

Indigenous issues were a major focus of the convention, and Hiltz praised the ELCIC for its repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery; its endorsement of the United Nations (UN) Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; its support for Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and ongoing efforts at healing; and its call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Welcoming refugees, building effective partnerships

Some of the actions taken related to LWF’s work. Hiltz highlighted the decision to welcome 500 refugees to Canada and the need to build effective partnerships with other organizations and faith traditions.

The convention gave overwhelming endorsement to the document “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders,” which the LWF and other faith-based organizations developed jointly with the UN High Commissioner

for Refugees in June 2013. The ELCIC invited its members and congregations to review it and sign the affirmations honoring respect for strangers, welcoming them into the community and advocating for their social justice.

Delegates asked the National Bishop to communicate this endorsement to the church’s major ecumenical and interfaith partners including the LWF, which they thanked for its work and leadership in promoting values of hospitality, protection, respect and equality

Climate justice: A matter of social justice

The focus on environmental stewardship included a commitment to plant 500,000 trees around the world, which resonates with LWF’s invitation to its churches to plant their own trees in the Luther Garden in Wittenberg, Germany by 2017, and to match this action locally.

The convention also gave strong approval to a resolution affirming ELCIC’s support for LWF’s ongoing advocacy that climate change is a matter of social and economic justice, as it af-



ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson (right) at the convention closing worship service. Photo: ELCIC

fects the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world.

Delegates affirmed LWF's call to political and business leaders to develop a strong global response to climate change by making deep cuts in carbon emissions through clear targets that include special assistance to the most vulnerable communities.

As part of its commitment, the ELCIC called on all its members, congregations,

and synods, as well as the national church, to become more sustainable and eco-friendly with the goal of neutralizing carbon emissions by 2050.

The delegates asked the National Bishop to write to the Canadian Prime Minister and other federal leaders expressing the ELCIC's concern for the climate. This would include pushing for an effective response at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in France,

in which the LWF will participate later this year.

With 121,000 baptized members, the ELCIC is Canada's largest Lutheran denomination. It joined the LWF in 1986. Its Convention, held once every two years, is the church's highest decision-making body.

(Edited from ELCIC Information)

Young American Lutherans step into the shoes of refugees

Simulated refugee experience "life changing"

DETROIT, United States/GENEVA (LWI) – One minute they were ordinary American young people, the next they were forced to make life-changing decisions as refugees in a simulation exercise.

Among the array of events at this year's youth gathering of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, young people were offered the chance to experience life as a refugee.

From 15 to 19 July, more than 30,000 young visitors attended the national gathering, which is held every three years. This year's event took place in Detroit, with the theme "Rise Up Together". Young people, adult leaders and volunteers came together for worship, service, fellowship, study and leadership development. A total

of 40 international global participants from across the LWF communion also joined in.

For Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council member Mikka McCracken, a program director for ELCA World Hunger, the gathering served as a place where young people were united in worship, active in service and encouraged to engage in conversations about the hard issues facing their communities and the planet.

One activity was a simulation in which young people were forced to flee their homes and make life-changing decisions in a matter of minutes; a situation faced by refugees the world over.

There, they learnt the hard way what life is like as a refugee.

Young people aged 14 to 20 took part in this simulation in groups of between five and 15. The aim was to give them an insight into the strenuous and hectic life of a refugee.

"A life-changing experience"

The simulation started in an ordinary living room. On the floor lay a number of vital goods, such as medicines, water bottles, birth certificates and other personal documents, money, toys, jewellery and diapers. After recordings of gunshots were played, the participants had a two-minute "grab" of essentials they would take before fleeing their homes.

They then went to the next station where another misfortune occurred. Their father was blinded by a bomb. They faced the dilemma of having to share scarce drinking water with another group. The simulation took part in a deliberately noisy atmosphere to add another element of disruption.

Next, they came to the refugee camp where they had to first register before being shown to a tent. The young people were given practical information, such as how many calories they would receive in food rations each day, where the water station was and the need to befriend fellow refugees, which was a "life-saving exercise" in a camp setting, LWF humanitarian coordinator Roland Schlott said.



Young people are put through their paces at an ELCA refugee simulation exercise. Photo: LWF/R. Schlott

“Very sobering” was the reaction of many participants, said Schlott. “There were also participants who themselves had once been refugees and lived in a camp. They were very cautious.”

Another young person described their participation as a “life-changing experience”.

It provided young people with a very different impression of refugees and situations in which people were forced to flee their homes, Schlott said.

“Previously, they knew only the insights of refugees from the side of humanitarian workers. Many thought that a couple of days in a tent would be quite funny. That may be the case with a family outing for a few days but for refugees who have already spend several months or even years in such camps, or most likely do

not even know when they will be allowed back, it is not the case.”

The simulation gave a clearer sense of the realities for people seeking refuge and might prompt young people to advocate for and donate to refugee programs, he said.

“I wanted to participate in the project because I wanted to get to know the youth, who are important for the future,” said Schlott, of his invitation to the meeting.

The church will matter into the future

An event the size and intensity of Rise Up Together indicated the Lutheran church was changing but still strong, McCracken said.

US media claims that the church was growing older and smaller were probably true but didn’t tell the entire story. “The ELCA Youth Gathering is one, highly visible way we know the church still exists and matters into the future, but also demonstrates that it may not look the same as it always has—in fact, perhaps it shouldn’t.”

As well as meeting in worship, a large proportion of the program focused on service to the city of Detroit. Each day, 10,000 young people went out in the city to work. By the end of Rise Up Together, they had painted nearly 1850 murals, boarded up 310 empty homes, cleared 3200 vacant lots of rubbish, installed 36 urban gardens and built nearly 100 picnic tables.

LAC churches find space for transformation in their HIV work

A new handbook to help churches learn practical responses

GENEVA (LWI) – The work of churches on HIV and AIDS can offer space for transformation, according to a new publication by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

HIV: Espacio para Cambiar, Spanish for HIV: Space for Change is the title of the handbook, which LWF LAC area secretary, Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti describes as “a resource for a ministry of love, compassion, transformation and continuous commitment to life.”

The publication has been jointly produced by the LAC HIV and AIDS network, which includes diaconal workers from the 17 LWF member churches in the region. Based on a methodology known as “see-reflect-act”, the handbook offers theological and diaconal practices that the churches in the region use in their HIV ministry. “It is a learning and teaching tool that reveals the many gifts that churches use to serve others in the reality of HIV and AIDS,” Cuyatti says.



The regional network that developed the handbook was established in 2012. “It was a long process because our dream was to not simply list the wonderful work carried out by the different ministries in our churches. Our challenge was to provide a theological resource based on the reading of the scriptures,” Cuyatti says. It builds on the LWF AIDS handbook,

Compassion, Conversion, Care, produced by the Department for Mission and Development in 2007 to guide churches’ response to the AIDS pandemic.

Welcoming everyone

A unique feature of the handbook is that it includes the views of people

living with HIV “who were invited to share, through their own voices, their life experiences as a way of opening our hearts and minds,” Cuyatti notes. Young theologians also contributed their personal reflections.

“This book contains the actions of our churches as they accompany people affected by HIV. This is our experience of walking with the excluded,” noted Bishop Dr Victoria Cortez Rodriguez of the Nicaragua Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE). In the handbook, ILFE’s contribution includes pastoral experiences on stigma and discrimination in HIV voluntary testing in a rural community. The Nicaraguan church also offers lessons from its youth accompaniment of people living with HIV, advocating for prevention, raising awareness about infection, and participating in AIDS-related civil society networks.

Although the publication includes aspects that are known in the church and society, it presents a specific challenge for the churches to continue learning to be open and welcoming spaces for everyone. This includes dealing with difficult issues related to family, marriage and sexuality, adds Cuyatti.

Sensitive issues

“I think this [HIV] has been an area in which churches have been able to touch sensitive issues such as HIV and homosexuality. I tried to help my church to create space and time and talk about these issues. We would like to address all the issues and there can be strong reactions. But there are stages during which we must also learn to speak, listen to songs and also just keep quiet and contemplate. This is a difficult process

in many regions and we will need to find space and time to discuss sensitive and intimate issues,” noted Bishop Siegfried Sander of the Lutheran Church in Chile.

The handbook can be easily studied in different spaces in the church and society, said Rev. Carlos Duarte, Pastor-President of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate in Argentina. “For us it is an opportunity to use a tool with which we can work as it relates to the actual situations in our churches. It contains important wisdom for churches: that God alone has called us to work with these brothers and sisters excluded from society.”

HIV: Espacio para Cambiar was discussed during the April 2015 LAC Leadership Conference in La Paz, Bolivia, and is currently available only in Spanish. Cuyatti hopes other LWF regions would find it adaptable to their respective contexts and translate it into other languages.

Calling for a ceasefire in Colombia

Open letter to conflict parties during Havana peace talks

GENEVA (LWI) – Together with leaders of many regional and international faith-based organizations, The General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Dr Martin Junge has signed a letter calling for the bilateral ceasefire in Colombia.

The open letter issued for DIPAZ: Inter-Ecclesial Dialogue for Peace in Colombia is addressed to Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia, as well as Timoleón Jiménez, Commander of the FARC – EP, and to the two head negotiators of the two parties, who are currently engaged in peace talks in Havana, Cuba. It has also been signed by John Nduna, General Secretary of the ACT alliance, Georges Lemopoulos, Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), as well as 31 representatives of Colombian church and faith organizations and 113 representatives of international church and faith organizations.

“We cannot help but express our sorrow, as Christians and as human



LWF World Service team visiting remote rural communities who have been affected by the conflict in Colombia. Photo: LWF Colombia

beings, in response to the deaths that continue taking place in Colombia, which could have been avoided with an agreement for a bilateral ceasefire”, they state in the letter.

“We want to manifest our solidarity and accompaniment with the Colombian people who have cried out for

many years for peace as the fruit of justice, in order that the lives of all might benefit, especially the poorest men and women in the country. They are the ones who have been the most impacted by the armed conflict”.

The conflict in Colombia has been going on for more than five decades. Half

a million people have died in this conflict, the majority of them civilians. More than 15,000 people are missing. The ongoing guerilla warfare has displaced millions of people. Recently, rebel sabotage activities have left hundreds of thousands without clean water and electricity. Peace talks which have been held in Havana for two and a half years have, according to the main negotiator, reached a critical low point. Last weekend, the FARC guerrilla announced a unilateral ceasefire to rescue the peace process.

“These are important steps towards an agreement that involves both parties”, the statement signed by LWF General Secretary Dr Martin Junge

says. “We write with the hope that you will continue following the path of dialogue until you reach a peace accord, which, ‘though imperfect, is a promise of greater things to come.’”

LWF’s presence in Colombia includes its member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) and two recognized congregations. The IELCO is active in the peace agreement through its Justice initiative that carries out peace work within the Diakonia Program. The letter has been also signed by Rev. Jairo Suarez, Diakonia Coordinator of the IELCO.

Upon IELCO’s invitation the LWF Department for World Service opened

a country office in Colombia in 2006. Together with the ACT Alliance and local networks, they have been working in the promotion of human rights, long-term sustainable development and humanitarian action.

The LWF is committed to peace and reconciliation in the country by supporting civil society organizations in the regions of Arauca and Choco to work for peace in these territories. Through the ACT Forum Colombia churches and ecumenical organizations are encouraged to ensure a negotiated political solution to the armed conflict, helping to create space for dialogue and consultation.

Diakonia network bolstering the efforts of small Brazilian organizations

A Lutheran foundation in Brazil is weaving together a group of small diaconal institutions to create a network that will enable its members to become stronger and better resourced.

By connecting some 60 social organizations under the umbrella of Rede de Diaconia – or the Diakonia Network – the Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia (FLD) believes members will collectively reach more people, particularly woman and youth, than they would do alone.

The FLD is the diaconal arm of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil. The goal of Rede de Diaconia is to enhance diaconal work in Brazil, a country in which a large number of small institutions often work in isolation or without the support of a larger body.

“As the network supports 60 institutions, over 1000 people must be more or less directly linked to it,” the Lutheran World Federation Secretary for Project Coordination and Monitoring, Ilona Dorji, says.

According to the Executive Secretary of the FLD, Cibele Kuss, networking is one of the traits of vital ministry. “Supportive relationships between churches and organizations with a purpose help bring focus to diaconal work through group learning, mutual coaching and opportunities to discover new perspectives with like-hearted community players.”

Human rights, gender equality, support to the disabled and elderly, as well as food security are the network’s main areas of interest.

“Rede de Diaconia aims to serve Brazilian society through a system of support, monitoring, evaluation and better coordination of diaconal projects,” Dorji said. It reaches beyond Lutheran confessional boundaries to address issues such as human rights, domestic and social violence, indigenous rights and food security and sovereignty. In such a geographically large country, the network comes into its own in strengthening diaconal work and collaboration, she said.



Rede de Diaconia members plan actions for 2015 after closing the 2014 year with positive results. Photo: FLD

The LWF has supported Rede de Diaconia for three years. Since the creation of the network, at least 10 new organizations have joined each year.

During the first phase, from 2013 to 2015, the network was set up and promoted amongst diaconal institutions. It created training programs, particularly for women and youth, built a website and formed a partnership between FLD, two regional groups and the Gender Research Group of the tertiary education institute Faculdades EST.

The network is expected to expand and reinforce its significance as an organization for supporting and connecting diaconal institutions. The concept of diakonia networks could be replicated in other regions or countries, Dorji said.

Through joint activities and more workshops and seminars, the network wants to strengthen the role of youth.

The second phase of Rede de Diaconia is expected to start next year.

Djibouti: Help for refugees from Yemen

“Extremely challenging conditions”

OBOCK, Djibouti/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is assisting refugees from Yemen who have sought shelter in neighboring Djibouti.

According to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, more than 51,000 Yemeni have fled the country since Houthi militia took over the government four months ago.

Latest statistics from the International Organization for Migration and the Djibouti government show that by the end of June, Djibouti had received a total of 20,832 people. About half are Yemeni nationals. The others are nationals from other countries who had been working in Yemen and fled the violence there, among them also 9 percent Djibouti people.

“This makes Djibouti to currently be the biggest Yemeni refugee population,” LWF Representative for Kenya-Djibouti, Lennart Hernander says.

Education support

Most of the refugees arrive in the capital, Djibouti city, or in Obock, where UNHCR has established the Markazi refugee camp. The LWF is planning to provide core relief goods to people with specific needs, such as the elderly, chronically ill, unaccompanied minors and separated children who are taken care of by LWF organized community services.

As the UNHCR’s main education partner, the LWF will provide education opportunities to children of school-going age. The LWF will provide school materials, staff and general leadership



LWF staff member Fahima Ismail talks to Yemen refugees in the Markazi camp, near Obock town, during a LWF assessment of the needs of refugees. Photo: LWF/J. Macharia

and management of the education project. This is also meant to mitigate the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of routine, stability and structure. “Education means hope for the future to the Yemen refugees,” Hernander says.

Markazi camp is located in a very hot, dry and dusty region. “Conditions in Markazi and Obock are extremely challenging,” Hernander says. “This makes the living conditions extremely difficult especially for children, elderly and the sick”.

Pressure on protracted refugee situation

The LWF is already in the country as it has been supporting refugees from Somalia in Ali Addeh and Holl Holl camps since 2009. Those camps have a total population of 12,555 refugees.

Many have been there for more than two decades. The conflict in Yemen has added to the protracted refugee situation in Djibouti. As the fighting in one of the world’s poorest countries has left millions without food and fuel, people flee on boats across the Gulf of Aden to safety.

The LWF is also responding by providing and managing schools in Holl Holl and Ali Addeh camps as well as an urban Djibouti project. This is in addition to community services and child protection activities in the two camps and an urban refugee project which serves 2,600 beneficiaries.

“The developments in Yemen are putting a lot of pressure on the refugee population and on those who provide support and assistance,” Hernander says. “We need help to respond to the humanitarian crisis which is unfolding here.”

Violence in Burundi, rising refugee numbers in Tanzania

LWF/ TCRS assists in overcrowded Nyarugusu camp

BUJUMBURA, Burundi/NYARUGUSU, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – As presidential elec-

tions commence in Burundi, civil unrest has once again soared in the capital

of Bujumbura. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has closed the office

for the election period. “I spoke to colleagues in Bujumbura this morning and they informed me that there was heavy shooting all night,” Michael Hyden, LWF Program Officer for Burundi, says.

The LWF has five staff in Bujumbura and 27 staff in Chankuzo, in the east of the country. “All are accounted for and have been requested to stay at home during the election period, and we have closed the offices in the meantime”, Hyden says. “As of this morning, it seems people in Bujumbura are scared to go out and vote while in the rural areas, the people are preparing to go in voting stations”.

Night terror by youth militia

Meanwhile people continue to flee from Burundi to neighbouring Tanzania, where the Tanganyika Church refugee Service (TCRS), an associate program of the LWF, is assisting in the Nyarugusu refugee camp. As of 9 July 2015, there were 76,263 Burundian refugees reg-

istered in Western Tanzania, with up to 3,000 new arrivals every day.

One of them is Regine Nibogora, a cassava farmer from Rumonge in southwest Burundi. She had a small plot of land, and would often work on other people’s farms for extra wages to support her seven young children. She left after she received a late night visit by the Imbonerakure (which translates to “the far-sighted”), the youth militia of the ruling party.

“My neighbor once received a visit from them, during which he refused to pledge allegiance to the ruling party,” she recounts. “He was taken away by the Imbonerakure, we never saw him again.” When the Imbonerakure visited her at night and demanded to know who she had voted for, she decided to leave.

The mother of seven was on her own. Her husband had left the family right after she had given birth to their youngest daughter, Stella, who is now 15 months old. As she could not take all of her children, Nibogora on

that same night entrusted her oldest, a 10-year-old girl, to her sister who intended to flee to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After making sure they had left safely, she took the other six children to the southern province, Makamba, where she and her children boarded a ferry to Tanzania’s Kagunga. She arrived at Nyarugusu on 13 July.

“Only concerned about peace”

TCRS assists the Burundi refugees in Nyarugusu with core relief items such as kitchen sets, a bucket, jerry cans and shelter. The family is sharing a space with 230 other individuals in an extension of the refugee camp.

The day after she arrived to the camp at least 31 soldiers who took part in a failed coup on 13 May, were killed in fighting with the security forces in Cibitoke and Kayanza provinces near the border with Rwanda. The authorities also said that at least 100 rebels were captured. A large number of the population are expected to boycott today’s elections for fear or in protest.

Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, which has been home to 60,000 Congolese refugees for many years, now has over 127,000 people living there. There is need for water, shelter, sanitation and psychosocial support in the overcrowded camp. The number of refugees is expected to rise to half a million if the situation in Burundi does not change.

“I am keen to return whenever Burundi is peaceful again,” Nibogora says. To her, it does not matter who is in power. “I am only concerned about peace.”



Regine Nibogora and her youngest daughter Stella. Photo: CWS/ Aaron. A Tate

Laos: New farming techniques for climate change

Combination of old skills and new approaches

LUANG NAMTHA, Laos/ GENEVA (LWI) – Poverty and scarce food supply was just a fact of life for the people in Koutou village, Luang Namtha province, Laos. With most people relying on rice

farming and livestock for their livelihood, there were few options for other income. Climate change and extreme weather make their lives especially difficult. Recurring drought makes

them worry about every harvest, while hunger and the lack of clean water cause disease, most of which the people cannot afford to have treated professionally.

Koutou is one of 13 villages in Vieng Phoukha district where The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) started an empowerment project that promotes human rights in January 2015. To improve living conditions for the villagers, the LWF conducts vocational training and workshops in vegetable planting, bio extract manure production and composting to promote small income generation programs and improve farm yield in order to provide nutritious food and income.

"I have improved my vegetable home garden by following the instruction of the trainers and it works," says Souk, a resident of Koutou who is only known by her first name. "I often make bio extract

and fertilizer to water my vegetable garden because I feel that it doesn't require complicated preparations and looking after. It is not costly and it is simple to make," she adds.

Like the other project participants, she received vegetable seeds and gardening equipment from the LWF to start fertilizer production and home gardening. "The vegetables grow very well," Souk says. "I can earn income from selling some of them and still have enough to cook for my children." She also takes dried seeds from the oldest plants in order to replant them.

"Many of the villagers have their own experience and skills in vegetable gardening," Phonexay Simayvanh, a LWF

community empowerment facilitator in Koutou, says. "The new knowledge now creates more possibilities for them to earn money."

The people of Koutou have always used fertilizer to improve their yield but the chemical solution they used before severely damaged the soil's nutrient balance. The chemicals were harmful to the farmers' health. The bio extract manure introduced by the LWF is a sustainable alternative with no risk to people's health. Sustainability and environmentally-friendly solutions are also the main characteristics of other measures introduced by the LWF.

Previously, the people of Koutou would not re-generate indigenous seeds for further production. To cultivate rice, indigenous communities would burn the bush land and cut the trees. De-forestation had an impact on the ecology. LWF conducts awareness campaigns on environment protection, tree planting, chemical-free cultivation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and subsequently, disaster risk reduction.

However, climate change will remain the biggest challenge in the years to come. As the risk of disaster increases, the project and the villagers aim to develop more effective and sustainable interventions, to ensure the families always have enough to eat.



A villager from Koutou employs new agriculture techniques to produce a good crop. Photo: LWF Laos

Laos: School support to students with disabilities

LWF school supplies help deaf students Vone and Viengkeo learn

VIANGCHAN, Laos/GENEVA (LWI) – Vone and Viengkeo, both six- years old, are neighbors in Vieng Phouka, a poor district of Laos. They enjoy learning and playing in school and meeting friends. When their primary school lessons end, they are expected to do their chores and take care of younger siblings.

However, Vone and Viengkeo are especially challenged: they are deaf. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supports both girls and 22 other people living with disabilities in the

village through a "rights-based empowerment" project.

Opportunities and future uncertain

"There are many barriers for them," says Vongmany Vongphachanh, manager of the LWF Laos Program. "The school is in a bad condition, and teaching and learning materials are insufficient. The teachers' skills in dealing with their disabilities are limited. Their

[girls'] families are poor. Their opportunities and future are uncertain."

Through the project, the families of Vone and Viengkeo receive educational materials and school equipment. "They keep the school material close to their sleeping space every day," one of the parents translates the girls' sign language. "The girls are very happy about receiving the education material. They make sure to bring them to school every day."

But the project is doing more than just providing material aid. Rights-based

empowerment focuses on improving access to basic social services, on income generation, capacity-building for local governance, and climate change adaptation and emergency response.

The project specifically supports very poor families, women, children and people with disabilities in very rural and indigenous communities. Just over 11,700 people in Vieng Phoukha and Nalae, some of the poorest districts in Laos, will benefit from the intervention. Most of the district's inhabitants are Khmu, an ethnic minority, but there are also groups of Akha, Muzer, Kui and Tai Lue, all of them marginalized communities. Almost half of the project participants are women, and 444 are people with disabilities like Vone and Viengkeo.

Educating the community

Helping Vone and Viengkeo receive education means educating and empowering their community. "Vone now goes to school every day and I'd like to support her with her studies," her father Savanh, says. "However, I do not know what she learns. I am illiterate, so I cannot help her at home."



Vone and Viengkeo are eager students at the local school. Photo: LWF Laos

"The girls look very happy when they are at school and play with friends. They are keen to learn and it comes to them naturally," Phengsy, the primary school teacher adds. "But my support is insufficient for them. It is quite a challenge for me to respond to their special needs."

The project, which started its second phase in January 2015, will run for five years. By then, Vone and Viengkeo would have finished primary school. Their success in life will also indicate

whether the project has been successful. It is a long way, with many little steps. "Before I did not know if Viengkeo would ever be able to go to school," says her mother Thongkham. "She is deaf. How can she learn? Now I only hope she can continue going to school and playing with her friends there."

Contribution by Alounsavanh Zaysongkham, LWF Laos. Edited by LWF Communications.

LWF Nepal and Korean Diakonia join in earthquake response

Support to households in Bhaktapur

KATHMANDU, Nepal (LWI) – Rev. Sung-Jin Jung of the Korean Diakonia/World Diakonia (KD/WD) and Dr Prabin Manandhar, Country Director of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work in partnership on relief work with earthquake-affected people.

The objective of the cooperation between the KD/WD and LWF Nepal is to support earthquake-affected people in Bhaktapur district in building transitional homes and temporary latrines for safe living, before later aiding them in reconstructing their homes and latrines.

Under the cooperation, the KD/WD will provide USD 100,050 to support the 150 earthquake-affected households of Bhaktapur district. Priority will be given to members of the Dalit or artisan caste, ethnic minorities, women-headed households, households with members with disabilities or chronic illnesses, households made up solely of elderly people, families depending entirely on daily wage labor, and other minority and disadvantaged groups.

"We are pleased to partner with LWF Nepal to support the earthquake-affected people of Bhaktapur district," Rev. Jung said during the signing.

"Our partnership will support the earthquake-affected people to recover from the emergency and rebuild their lives," LWF Country Director, Dr Manandhar added.

LWF Nepal has already provided relief to 817 family members of Bhaktapur district. The Korean support will be used for early recovery and rehabilitation. The one-year program spanning from 1 June 2015 to 30 May 2016 will cover the Manjushree and Changu Narayan municipalities of Bhaktapur district where most inhabitants are indigenous communities. LWF Nepal will implement the program in

the district through Transformations Nepal, a local implementing partner.

LWF Nepal has formed strong regional partnerships through the earthquake response. Among the first to support the ACT Alliance appeal was Amity Foundation, a Chinese non-governmental organization. Korean Diakonia started to cooperate with ACT Alliance through World Diakonia in 2014. The organization is among others conducting relief activities for socially vulnerable groups and working with Syrian and Haitian refugees.

LWF Nepal has more than 30 years' experience in disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness and response. The team started assisting people affected by the earthquake on 25 April hours after the disaster hap-



Earthquake destruction in Durbar Square in Bhaktapur, Nepal. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

pened. Since then, LWF Nepal has distributed relief goods to just over 21,000 households in Lalitpur, Bhak-

tapur, Kathmandu, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Makawanpur and Rasuwa districts.

LWF Nepal provides aid to families with special needs

“Toughest days are still ahead”

KATHMANDU, Nepal /GENEVA (LWI) – While he could see everyone else run away from their homes when the earthquake hit on 25 April, Dharma Lal Shrestha, 63, of Shankarapur Municipality, Sanagaun, was helpless. He knew it was an earthquake and that he needed to leave the house, but his physical disability made it impossible for him to move. “As the house shook, I was on the first floor, praying to God for help,” he said.

Shrestha's leg was amputated in June last year following a gangrene infection. Since then, all he can do is crawl. He needs assistance to climb stairs. As he is also partially paralyzed he cannot even move on crutches. “Everyone is concerned about their own safety,” he says. “There was nobody around whom I could call for help.”

“Everyone is concerned about themselves”

The earthquake hit hardest those who were already struggling. Shrestha's

65-year-old neighbor Krishna KC has lived with only one leg for more than 30 years. Life has been difficult in that time. His son married and moved away, and became estranged from him. Together with his wife he lives in a rented property. KC was resting when the earthquake started. “My crutches just fell down and I leaped to reach to the window for support,” he said. The house wall collapsed on him. He lost consciousness. “My family thought I was dead,” he recalls. Still, he managed to save himself. “My wife was crying when I emerged from my house,” KC says.

Shrestha has two sons and three daughters. They had left their father on the upstairs floor so he could rest on that Saturday but when the earthquake hit, none of them were at home. “I was lucky enough. Although the wall collapsed, it did not fall on my side. I sustained only minor injuries,” he said, recalling his harrowing experience. The upper floor collapsed in the earthquake.

When his son arrived 15 minutes later to find his father alive in the middle of all the destruction, the younger Shrestha burst into tears. “It must have been a God who saved me. My own uncle, who lived next to our house, died,” Dharma Lal Shrestha, a practicing Hindu, says.

A new life

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) together with its partners provided the families of Shrestha and KC with food and other relief goods when they had nothing to eat and no place to live. The food included rice, lentils, cooking oil, salt, spices and milk powder for small babies. It also provided the families with a tarpaulin to build a make-shift tent, and gave them mattresses, hygiene kits and a water bucket, as well as a water purifier. They also received assistance to build toilets. “They were a great help to us,” Shrestha says.

The LWF also provided psycho-social counseling to the earthquake

affected families in Sanagaun, one of the worst affected villages in Lalitpur district. Although Shrestha feels he has gone through the toughest time already, he is worried about the period

ahead. His family does not have any food grain in stock. As they do not own land, there is no hope of harvesting the crops any time soon. Shrestha's son used to work in a motorcycle repair

company but quit the job to assist his paralyzed father. "We had collected some grain, but whatever food stock we had was buried under the debris. We are wondering what to do next," says Shrestha's son. "Food and shelter are the main worries now."

For KC, the earthquake also improved family relations. "My son still lives separate from us, but now we are on good terms again," he says. "Though my house is destroyed, I am happy the earthquake has mended our relationship."

He is presently living in a makeshift house. The rubble of his earlier house is yet to be cleared. "I lost everything but got a new life," he added. "Despite being buried under a house wall, I am still alive."

Contribution by Kosh Rai Koirala, Nepal. Edited by LWF communications.



KC sitting in front of his destroyed house. Photo: Kosh Raj Koirala

Nepal: Shelter from the monsoon rain

"An unfolding disaster"

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI)— School is over in Dunche, the headquarters of Rasuwa district, and 190 displaced children wait in a makeshift classroom for the rains to stop. The school is an assortment of tents, with foam mattresses as the only furniture. The floors have turned into mud and the children look disheveled. The rains don't stop, and half an hour later the students run to their shelters below the bazaar, soaked to the bone.

The arrival of monsoon used to be a happy moment for the Nepalese, as it marked the planting of rice on water-fed fields and terraces. After the 25 April earthquake however, the rainy season mostly brings fear and discomfort: an estimated 2.5 million people are still living in temporary shelters.

Animals crawl into shelters

"Last night my shelter was flooded. Stray dogs and frogs came to take

refuge under the bed. My feet are swollen and I am unable to work," says Goma Paryar (40) from Indreni. Goma lives with six relatives in a temporary shelter, a single room which is actually one big tent. Living with them is their daughter and her baby boy who was born a month before the earthquake.

Although Goma feels insecure and unwell since the monsoon started, she is better off compared to her community members. Most people in the Indreni settlement are Dalit or artisans and live under tarpaulins provided by the ACT Alliance, the humanitarian relief network of which the LWF is a member. Goma was able to take out a USD 218 loan and buy zinc sheets for a more durable shelter. She used the sheets for a stronger roof and tarpaulins to create protective walls.

LWF Nepal is providing transitional shelter materials to the community of Indreni, but supplies are short. "The Nepalese industry cannot meet the demands. We order zinc sheets from

India but they take at least three weeks to arrive," Dr Prabin Manandhar, Country Director of the LWF Nepal says.

Distributing the sheets is another challenge. "Roads are blocked and there is the constant danger of landslides. Trucks loaded with relief materials get stuck resulting in more time loss," Dr Manandhar explains. "It's a race against time to provide the communities with zinc sheets and other relief materials needed to stay safe and healthy during monsoon."

Unfolding disaster

The 2015 monsoon has been termed as 'an unfolding disaster' by the Nepali government and aid organizations alike. According to the mountain development agency ICIMOD more than 3,000 landslides were triggered by the earthquake. The agency also keeps track of large mass movements created by the ongoing aftershocks. Countless settlements are at risk.



Makeshift houses built from plastic sheets and tarpaulins are the only protection against the rain for many people. Photo: LWF/ Lucia de Vries

“The government is coming up with a relocation plan for the people at risk but reaching out to scattered groups of displaced people is not an easy task for aid agencies like us,” says Manandhar.

In the densely populated temporary housing sites, the risk of epidemic waterborne disease outbreaks such as cholera is high. Apart from setting

up water tanks and emergency toilets and showers, LWF staff together with the Nepal ACT Alliance Forum members hand out hygiene kits with water purification tablets, soap and sanitary towels for women.

Lactating and pregnant women are most vulnerable during monsoon, agrees Prabin Manandhar. “Women

and children generally struggle to get access to nutritious food and health services.”

At Goma’s shelter, Radhika has just returned with her baby boy. She used the muddy village path to reach the health post for the child’s monthly check up. The boy looks healthy and flashes a big, happy smile. With the support from LWF Nepal, families like Goma’s stand a much better chance to stay safe and healthy during the rainy season.

In the immediate response to the 2015 earthquake, LWF Nepal with the support of ACT Alliance members supported over 110,000 families with emergency relief. The organization is committed to help families in five affected districts to rebuild their lives through food security, shelter, water and sanitation and psychological assistance, and link this with long-term development.

Contribution by Lucia de Vries, Nepal. Edited by LWF Communications

Monsoon slows reconstruction in Nepal

LWF provides shelter and psychosocial support

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – Three months after the earthquake in Nepal, the need for more durable shelter solutions has become a priority.

“The emergency work has entered into the early recovery phase. We have begun to construct temporary shelters with zinc sheets and local building materials,” Ram Sharan Sedhai, communications officer of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal says. “The people have gradually recovered from the horror. They have started planting crops and taking care of livestock. For many, life is returning to normality.”

However, this is not the case for many people in the districts worst affected by the earthquake. “In Gorkha, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha and Rasuwa districts, many people are still living

without proper settlements and under tarpaulin sheets,” he says. “Luckily there have been no outbreaks of communicable diseases.”

The monsoon is slowing the aid work. Many villages are inaccessible due to landslides, and aid transports get stuck in the mud on the unpaved mountain passes.

Priority is most vulnerable

LWF is constructing temporary shelters in the worst affected villages in Rasuwa, Sindhupalchok, and Dolakha districts and the districts of the Kathmandu valley. “We prioritize Dalits, women-headed households, elderly people, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities,” Sedhai says.

One of them is Rama Devi Shrestha, 49, from Shankarapur, Sanagaun. Her house collapsed on top of her. “I was lucky that I only injured my legs although I was buried in the debris,” she recalled that fateful midday on April 25. “The doctors have told me that I can walk again in six months.”

Meanwhile, however, there is no one to take care of her. Rama Devi Shrestha’s husband died a long time ago. While she was rushed to the hospital, a heavy aftershock destroyed what was left of the house he had built for them – and the entire neighborhood.

Her son, like many young men, left to find work abroad. He still has to pay back the loan he took to pay the ticket to Malaysia. Rama Devi Shrestha

needs shelter, crutches and medical treatment, which she cannot afford.

The earthquake has also upset the tender balance in the life of her neighbor, Kanchi Shrestha. The 71-year-old woman broke her leg when falling during the earthquake. The injuries only heal slowly. “The doctor said that it is very difficult to mend a broken leg at this age,” Kanchi Shrestha said. “I want to walk again.” While her son and his wife worked to sustain the family, Kanchi Shrestha used to take care of her granddaughter, a five-month old baby. With an injured leg, that is no longer possible.

Giving back hope

Families like the two Shresthas’ need various kinds of assistance. LWF has been providing them with food, tarpaulins, mattresses, blankets, hygiene kits and water buckets with water purifiers. They also receive milk powder for the baby. LWF will help them rebuild their homes.

Until now, LWF has given aid to more than 21,000 households in Nepal. Together with Islamic Relief Worldwide, the team has started to provide corrugated iron sheets to families who lost their homes in Rasuwa district, which will be used for medium term

shelter against the heavy rains of monsoon. The ACT Alliance Nepal Forum has provided relief items to 60,000 families affected by the earthquake.

As part of the emergency response, LWF Nepal has also implemented community-based psychosocial support. Working with and through community leaders, it aims to strengthen the resilience of the people and villages, improve their coping mechanisms and take care of their psychosocial wellbeing.

LWF has mobilized and strengthened existing networks and social organizations in communities impacted

by the earthquake. It plans to reach about 14,000 people with this special kind of care. Ideally, the networks will become sustainable structures and continue to improve life for people in difficult positions long after other projects have ended.

“I never thought I would remain alive. Although my house is broken down, my desire to live life has not been broken,” Rama Devi Shrestha says, while looking at her daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. None of her relatives were injured in the earthquake. To her, that is the most important thing.



Kanchi Shrestha, 71, nurses her broken leg in a makeshift shelter. The LWF has helped Shrestha and her extended family and will help them re-build their homes. Photo: LWF Nepal

Nicaragua: Food security and women’s rights

“Taking measures to adapt and survive”

VILLANUEVA, Nicaragua/GENEVA (LWI) – The day of Alma Nidia Martinez starts at five o’clock in the morning. That’s when she starts housework, cares for her three children, and tends to her small store and animals such as hens and ducks. Amongst all of her activities she makes time to visit friends and family members, and to give speeches about women’s rights in the community.

The 53-year-old farmer, trader, and single mother is a leader of the San Ramon community in the municipality of Villanueva, Chinandega province

of Nicaragua. Together with a group of people she was trained in the food sovereignty and food security promotion project in the municipalities of Somotillo and Villanueva. The Association for Eco-Sustainable Development (ADEES) has implemented this project with the support of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

“The Earth is a blessing”

Like everyone in the community, Martinez struggles to get by. She works the

land to grow healthy food for her family and generate income by selling extra crops in the local market or from home. She is, however, very aware of the delicate balance her food supply hangs in.

“To me the Earth is a blessing,” she says. “By planting seeds and watching them grow, by caring for the plants, giving them the right nutrients, and above all love, we can produce our food and be in harmony with the environment.

“It is more difficult now than it used to be because with climate change,



Alma Nidia Martinez believes in the power of women – and of change. Photo: LWF Central America

pests turn up unexpectedly. This means we have to be very watchful of the crops and take necessary measures to adapt and survive,” she adds.

Thanks to ADEES’ coordination with the Miriam Association, also a local partner and one that focuses on

women’s rights, empowerment and education, Martinez has been trained on gender issues. “I have participated in many workshops, and I feel that they have changed my life,” she says. “It is clear to me that when we know our rights and duties, we can make a

difference and define a place where we can live with dignity.”

Share the knowledge

She feels that it is now her responsibility to share this knowledge with others. “I have recognition certificates, which motivates me. My children say they are proud of me because I go to workshops to learn more. People are changing their minds little by little,” she observes.

The greatest encouragement recently came from her son. “He said: ‘Mama, look at how the times have changed. Before, when my friends saw me washing clothes, cooking, and cleaning the house as you would have me do, they would say that I was not a man. I now tell them that helping women with household chores doesn’t make you less of a man,’” she relates.

Contribution by LWF Central America, edited by LWF Communications.

Published and distributed by:
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